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# OPINION

## Seniors, you'll just have to get over it

Sorry seniors, it's for your own good.

Many Bloomfield High School seniors are lamenting the loss of their beloved senior privilege, a tactic that has allowed many 12th graders to arrive late or leave early – provided their first or last periods included lunch or study hall – for several years.

Say nothing of the moral incongruity of students not either being in school or attending to a school-related function during normal school hours. Superintendent Frank Digesers's decision is a no-brainer financially. Ending senior privilege takes away the potential for a disaster befalling a student and the district subsequently being liable.

The nightmare scenario is as follows: At 9:45 a.m. Thursday morning student X is walking across Broad Street, minding his or her own business, whereupon he or she is mowed down by a tractor trailer. As the district defends itself against the resulting multi-million dollar lawsuit, how does it propose to answer the following question with a straight face: Why was student X repeatedly allowed to arrive late?

Senior privilege, therefore, was as clear a recipe for catastrophe as one could find. It's hard to imagine the district having a leg to stand on in a resulting court case. All it takes is one irrational judge to uphold one outlandish claim and the financial consequences could be severe. And of course – of course! – the same parents who criticize the district for removing senior privilege now would be more than willing to seek untold damages from them if the policy remained and a future tragedy followed.

And how would the district's insurance providers respond to this? Pay out a legal claim and then dissolve the policy? Or simply refuse to reimburse the district? Imagine the district having to search for a new carrier, fresh off such ignominious circumstances. Again, we're not talking about pocket change here, nor three minutes worth of administrative attention.

So if the district has to live with a couple of disgruntled seniors for the short term, better they be disgruntled and in one piece as opposed to the alternative.

## Breaking new ground, and a renewed interest

**BROWSING AT THE BLOOMFIELD LIBRARY**

Linda M. Esler
Principal Librarian

I read a lot of science fiction in my teens. Like so many bright, awkward, adolescent girls, I felt like an alien in a world of miniskirts and pep rallies. Stories of time travel and creatures from outer space made more sense to me than the things that mattered to most girls my age.

Most of my favorite writers were men. I was so grateful to have found a refuge in the books of Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg and Theodore Sturgeon that I never cared about their gender.

When a new writer named James Tiptree, Jr. began publishing mind-bending science fiction stories, I was delighted to add him to my list.

"The Women Men Don't See" broke new ground. It expressed the radical notion that even the most ordinary women felt profoundly alienated from society.

"The Last Flight of Dr. Ain" offered a wickedly effective response to the environmental crisis. I had to read this unique piece more than once to get the message.

"The Girl Who Was Plugged In" demolished our cultural idea of "normal" beauty. This one made me cry.

Some readers speculated that "James Tiptree, Jr." might be the pen name of a sensitive female writer. Others argued that only a man could write such masculine prose.

On paper, James Tiptree, Jr. appeared to be a real "man's man." He served in the Army during World War II. He worked for the CIA. He wrote about hunting in the Belgian Congo and deep-sea fishing in the Yucatan.

Every detail was true except for the fact that "James Tiptree, Jr." was a woman.

Alice Bradley was born in 1915. Her parents took their only child with them on African expeditions. At an age when most girls of her class were playing with dolls, little Alice rode elephants and bandaged lepers. She learned firsthand what it meant to be an alien in a dangerous place.

In boarding school, the teenaged Alice read science fiction and "Weird Tales." She eloped with a poet she met at her debutante ball.

As a 30-year-old divorcee, Alice Davey joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. She met her second husband, Huntington Sheldon, while they were both serving in Europe during the Second World War.

After the war, both Sheldons worked for the Central Intelligence Agency and managed a chicken hatchery. Alice studied psychology and ran a research lab at George Washington University. When she began writing science fiction in the late 60s, Alice Sheldon found her pen name on the label of a jar of Tiptree's Jam.

She kept the secret for 15 years. As "Tiptree," Alice Sheldon wrote award-winning stories while conducting a voluminous correspondence with fans, editors and other writers. No one knew that the witty, courtly, generous "Tip" was a chronically depressed older woman.

Alice Sheldon never felt at home in her own body. She suffered from heart disease, arthritis and migraines. Slim and beautiful until the end of her life, she could never bear children or resolve the question of her own sexuality.

When the secret of "Tip's" identity became public, Alice's carefully balanced life fell apart. Suddenly, she did not know how to relate to old friends in the Sci-Fi community. Although she produced two novels and several short stories, her best work was behind her.

Alice Sheldon ended her own life.

Biographies usually disappoint me because the subject's life is so often less interesting than his or her work.

"James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice Sheldon" is a marvelous exception. Although the author, Julie Phillips, never met her subject, she has done a splendid job of presenting the remarkable life of an extraordinary woman.

The pleasures of this book are twofold.

Alice Sheldon was a fascinating person whose letters were nearly as entertaining as her books. In her darkest hours, she still managed to share warmth and wit with her many correspondents.

I enjoyed reading excerpts from those letters now almost as much as I had enjoyed reading her fiction as a lonely teenager who needed all the warmth and wit I could find.

I found myself saying "Oh! Tiptree wrote *that* one?" as I recalled some of my favorite stories. The goofy humor of "The Night-blooming Saurian" and the dark beauty of "With Delicate Mad Hands" stayed with me for years after I forgot who wrote them. "Forever to a Hudson Bay Blanket" and "The Screwfly Solution" seem like ghoulish old friends. "Beam Us Home" reminded me of why I loved watching the original "Star Trek" series.

Tiptree fans will love this biography. Those of you who may be reading James Tiptree, Jr. for the first time are in for a real treat. Check out the fiction shelves at the Bloomfield Public Library for "Byte Beautiful," "Crown of Stars," "Her Smoke Rose up Forever," "The Starry Rift" or "Up the Walls of the World." You'll be glad you did.

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## FROM OUR READERS

### Free candidate forum next week

**TO THE EDITOR:**

As Election Day draws closer, it is important for voters to learn about the candidates they choose to lead our government over the coming years.

To help residents in this decision, the Bloomfield Neighborhood Association Committee is again pleased to hold its annual candidate forum, this time focusing on the four candidates seeking the county executive slot.

The evening includes questions posed by a League of Women Voters moderater, as well as those offered by the audience. In addition, candidates will explain their goals in opening and closing statements, plus candidates and attendees can mingle afterwards over refreshments.

The free event takes place Wednesday, Oct. 25 starting at 7 p.m. at Van Fossan Theatre on the Bloomfield College campus, located at the corner of Franklin and Fremont streets.

Any questions? Leave a message at 973-748-6462 or e-mail sh4info@yahoo.com.

**Susan Hebert**
Bloomfield

### Security is not a partisan tool

**TO THE EDITOR:**

Most Americans agree that New York City and Washington, D.C. are the leading contenders for a future terrorist attack. Likewise, most Americans understand that al Qaida maintains an acute determination to carry out colossal assaults – the kind that are possible only in a small number of cities. So it makes sense for the federal government to focus its anti-terrorism grant money on the

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